

RECKLESS RALPH'S

DIME NOVEL ROUNDUP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers..Published by Ralph F. Cummings, Box 75, Fisherville, Mass., U.S.A.

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A LURID RECORD

By W.E.Bennett..

In a recent letter to Ralph Cummings I mentioned the fact that I once kept a record of everything I read for a whole year, in the "gay nineties", and he immediately suggested I write an article about it for the Roundup. So, if this blurb does not interest you, don't blame me; blame it on Ralph. This is, I think, a neat way of getting out from under. When I was a boy I lived with an uncle and aunt, who were the salt of the earth, but narrow in their views on reading. To them, a dime novel was an abomination. Now, old books and old periodicals of almost any kind, had a great fascination for me. My idea of a real good time was to delve in an old garret without restriction. My aunt called it "snooping". Curiously enough, our home library did not accord exactly with their beliefs. The first book I read was Judge Thompson's "Green Mountain Boys" which was a genuine thriller of the old-fashioned kind, with hunting adventures and scraps with the Indians. Another book was "Pioneer Heroes and Daring Deeds," containing sketches from the lives of Daniel Boone, Simon Kenton, Lewis Wetzel, etc., and related some adventures which were hair-raising, both figuratively and literally, and

which I suspect, were the basis of many a dime novel yarn. Also "A Wife's Tragedy" by May Agnes Fleming. "Tempest and Sunshine" and "Lena Rivers" by Mary J. Holmes and one or two by Capt. Mayne Reid.

The first author was represented in Beadles Dime Library with quite a number of stories. Mrs. Holmes stories appeared serially in the New York Weekly and Capt. Reid's boy's stories came out in the Wide-A-Wake Library, and his adult stories in Beadles. If I am not mistaken, one of his stories was the "star premium issue of that series. In those days the weekly newspaper was the rule for most families. Ours was the old Barry Adage and well do I remember some of the serials. "The Mystic Sign, or The King of the Mountain" - "Little Eddles, or, Abducted by the Bushwhackers" - both by Abbie C. McKeever - "Klink, the Cave Demon, or, The Wonderful Adventures of Ned and Tim", was another thriller. They sound like dime novel titles. Another weekly story paper was "The Home Circle" was borrowed of a neighbor, in which I became acquainted with Sylvanus Cobb, Jr., M. T. Calder, and Hugh Conway. While going to school I found that several boys were reading the abhorred dime novels on the sly and I finally succeeded in getting some of them which I kept out in the barn, under the hay. I think my uncle's suspicions were aroused in some way, for one day he prodded around with a pitchfork and brought up a copy of Saturday Night. A little further search revealed my secret hoard. I will never forget the look of horror on his face when he came up to the house and reported his thrilling discovery. I was not punished for my crime; but alas, they burned my library. It contained "Lotta, the young Lady Detective", an early issue of Old Cap Collier - "The Electric Man, or, Frank Reade, Jr. in Australia" by Noname,

which I still consider the best nickel novel I ever read. Also several copies of Saturday Night, the one impaled on the pitchfork bearing a spirited illustration of the dauntless detective dodging around the cell while the maniac pursues him with a large fat club. At that place in the story, it says, "To be continued". The title was, "Detective Work for Soldier's Orphans, or, Wide Awake Ward, the Silent Shadow" by W.F. Mott. Then there was a copy of the New York Weekly, containing the 1st installment of "The Old Detective's Pupil" by Nick Carter, and two Beadles Pocket Libraries.

My steady literary diet was supposed to be culled from the pages of the Youth's Companion, and some very good stories appeared in it. A Start in Life-and-The Little Master-by J.T. Trowbridge. The Osmer Acrolite, by Frank R. Stockton-Iron Trails, by George Manville Fern-Among the Labrador Eggers, by C.A. Stephens-Canoe and Rifle on the Orinoco, by William T. Hornaway-were some of the titles which the older readers may remember. From a friend, we borrowed copies of The Golden Argosy, which was then struggling for recognition. How well I can recall a Voyage to the Gold Coast, by Frank E. Converse-Work and Win, by Alger-Every Inch a Boy, by Optic-Stirring Events, by James Grant-and others.

One of our town boys was then preparing to go to the military academy at West Point and seeing a copy of Golden Days containing, "Cadet Days, or, Life at West Point" by Lieut. Hamilton; he subscribed for it, and I obtained the papers later. Then I became acquainted with Harry Castleman in "Our Fellows, or, The Skirmishes With the Swamp Dragoons" and "The Young Game Warden; Dr. Shippen's fine stories-The Wreck of the Golconda-and Jack Peters' "Adventures in Africa and others.

There was the old Leisure Hour Library published by Lupton and which contained some stories fully as sensational as many in the abhorred Beadles. To mention a few. The Fatal Glove-and-The Pearl of the Ocean, by Clara Augusta-The Woman Hater-and-The Guardian's Plot, by Dr. J. H. Robinson, and several by Miss Bradon-Mary Cecil Hay-Amanda M. Douglas-Etta W. Pierce-etc.

When I was 14, I went out in the world to seek my fortune and my first step on the downward path, was to purchase a copy of the the old Wide-Awake Library entitled "Shortys Trip Around the World" by Peter Pad, and was the longest story I ever saw in a single issue of that series, running to 64 pages. From that it was just another step to the Boys of New York where I reveled in the adventures of Frank Reade, Jr.-Handsome Harry-Old King Brady and many others.

Then, on Jan. 1st, 1893, I had my great idea. I would keep a record for one year, of everything I read-From the beginning of my reading I had recorded the books and serials, but this should even include the shorts. That old record is before me now, as I write, and a curious looking thing, it is. Titles of books and serials are printed, with a favorite author or story, entered in red ink. At this date, I was buying at the newstand, four story papers every week: Golden Days-Saturday Night-Good News-and the Argosy. Toward the latter part of the year, I stopped the first and last and substituted The New York Weekly and Golden Hours. In Golden Days, I read: The Mutiny on the Sea Eagle, by Ralph Hamilton-Off Shore, by Wm. P. Chipman-Sons of Steel, or,

The Honors of the Hudson, by Victor St. Clair-Defying the Desert, or, Adventures on the Great Plains-and-The Priests of the Sun, or, The Silver City of the Yucatan, both by

John H. Whitson-Roland Arkney and his Evil Genius, or, The Ghost of Treasure Island-and-The History and Mystery of Chic Dugray, a story of the Pine Barrens, by Fred E. Janette-Humpty's Luck, by Mary T. Waggaman-Just Binks, by Wilton Burton, whose stories of Southern Life had a high literary character-The Duncan Boys, by W. Bert Foster-Hickory Vance, by J. W. Davidson-The Treasure of Two Islands, by Alex C. Durbin-and others.

Saturday Night yielded such titles as: Black Eyed Adele, the Little One of Carters Ranch, by Apache George-Mademoiselle Morphine, or, Kerry Blair and the Opium Queen, by W. F. Mott-The Two Princesses, or, The Mystery of the Tower, by Helen Couvin Pierce-Evadne, the Millionaire's Daughter, by Mary Kyle Dallas-and several others.. From Good News, came: Last Chance Mine, by Lieut. James K. Orton-The Counterfeiter's League-and-Reuben Green's Adventures, by James Otis, who was also Mr. Orton, but whose real name was J. O. Kaler-Careless Jack, by Oll Ccomes-three by William Murray Gradon, namely: Commodore Frank-Exiled to Siberia, and In Fort and Prison. In this paper, also appeared: A Roving Commission, by Charles H. Cranston-Mortimer Blount, by George H. Cocomer-The Golden Moose, or, Under the Polar Star, by DeWitt Conklin-Matt Merriman, the Mesmerist-and-Matt Merriman Abroad, both by Harvey Hicks-A Texas Fortune, by Randolph Hill-The Young Ranchers, or, Fighting the Sioux by Edward S. Ellis-The Treasure of the Golden Crater-and-Ensign Merrill, by Lieut. Lounsbury-The Guld Cruisers, by St. George Rathboun-Glim Peters, or, Tracing the Insurance Swindlers, by Walden F. Sharpe-Dick Oakley's Adventures, by Clarence C. Converse-and others.

From The Argosy, I got such titles as: The Bonniewood Boys, A Story of the Border, by Joseph Grant Ewing-The Doom of McGragor's-

and-The Fate of Horace Hildreth, both by Judson Newman Smith-The Treasure of Wild Rock Island, by E.E. Youmans-Matthew White's stories: A Publisher at Fifteen-In the Grasp of Another-and, The Young Flagman. Mr. Graydon was also in this paper with: Tracked Through Russia-and-The Penrose Plot.. W. Bert Foster's In Alaskan Waters-Comrades Three-and Under A Cloud, by J.W. Davidson-Oliver Optic's Cruise of the Dandy and Always In Luck-The Hetherington Fortune, by Annie Ashmore, and others.

In Golden Hours, there were several thrillers: Weldon J. Cobb was represented by, Wide Awake Ned-Out of Sight-and The Chinese High binders-Fred Thorpe in Bob, the Hoodco, or, The Luck a Gold Horseshoe Brought, and, A Son of the Soil.. John DeMorgan in The Birth of a World-Ponce deLeon-and, Linden's Vow.. Harrie Irving Hancock, in, The Boy Surveyor-The Young West Pointer-and Hustling in Montana.. Cornelius Shea in, Bob Borden in Asia-The Yellow Plumes-and, Salt Lake Sam... Frank Sheridan in, The American Robinson Crusoe-and, Life Line Larry... Matt Royal contributed The Vandam Mystery, and last, but not least, Bicycle Ben, the Knight of the Wheel, or, The Coiners of Coal Crest, by the great and only William Gilbert Patten, which I suspect, was his first serial.

In the New York Weekly, was: Gideon Drexel's Millions, or, Nick Carter's Puzzling Case-and Madcap Merriabel, by Julia Edwards. How disgusted I would have been had I known that "Julia" wore pants and acknowledged to the name of Edward Stratemeyer.. Besides these papers which I bought regularly, there were some miscellaneous ones. The Witch Tiger, by Hal Standish in the Boys of New York and in The Black Hercules, by Dan DeQuille-and, The Bank Robbery, by James Knapp Reeve.

In THE Yankee Blade-The Mystery of the Flying Cloud.A Weird Tale of the Sea,by Marlton Downing-and-A Tennessee Girl,by Wm. Perry Brown.

And now we come to the books.They were mostly of the pamphlet novel kind.In the War Library-Hilt to Hilt,by J.M.Meril-and-A Soldier of Fate,by Col.Oram Eflor,which when spelled backwards is Maro Rolfe..In the Union Library-Walt Collier's Pluck,by Wm.H.S. Atkinson..In Old Cap Collier-Jack Sharpe's Victory,by Mark Merrick-and-Bert Pax,the Young Vidocq,by Old Cap Collier..In Wide Awake Library-No.998,Little Tommy Bounce on His Travels,by Peter Pad..In Detective Library-Old King Brady-and-Captain Iron Hand... In Nick Carter Library-No.75,The Cincinnati Bank Swindle (This was my introduction to Nick)-No.83,The Freight Thieves-#87,The Watchmakers Hammer-#80,The Prince of Creeks-#98,Identity of Daly-#99,The Bookmaker's Crime-#28,The Passenger Going East-#92,The Highwayman Sidetracked-#122,A Millionaire Fraud-#110,Among the Firebugs-and #124,The Fate of Burglar Jow.

In the Frank Reade Library,were:#49, Frank Reade,Jr.,in the Sea of Sand and His Discovery of a Lost People-#57, Frank Reade with His Airship in Asia,or,A Flight Across the Steppes...In the Boys Star Library-#319, Jack Wright and His Iron Clad Air Motor,or, Searching for a Lost Explorer-#312, Jack Wright and His Electric Dynamo Boat,or,The Mystery of a Buried Sea-#323, Jack Wright and His Prairie Privateer,or,Fighting the Western Road Agents. The Jack Wright and Frank Reade stories were certainly of a highly interesting character. To me, the wonder of it is, Lou Senarens writing at the speed he did, could produce such good work. There was another series I read,which could almost be

classed as a "Library", and that was the "Star Sayings of Popular Novels". They were, if I remember correctly, about the size of the Boys Star Library, but only 16 pages, and not illustrated, and were the supplements to a St. Louis newspaper. Here are some of the titles: The Doctor's Secret, by Rita-My Jo John, by Helen Mathus-The Havoc of a Smile, by L.B. Walford-Scarlet Fortune, by Henry Herman-Was She Good or Bad, by Prof. W. Minto-etc. In the thick paper books were two by Capt. Mayne Reid; The Free Lances-and-The Death Shot-The Lost Mine, by J.H. Connolly in Collier's Once-a-Week Library-and several others in that series, of rather small interest. Also-Fighting Against Millions, by Nick Carter in the old Secret Service Series. The grand total for the year was 82 books-121 serials-and 933 short stories.

I have been asked who were my favorite authors at this time. Well, that is a hard one to answer. I have always considered Emerson Bennett and Leon Lewis to be the patriarchs of the lurid era; but I believe, for all-around excellence, I would nominate Weldon J. Cobb, of Chicago. At that time, Cobb was called "the lightning fiction writer" of the world and it was said he could produce more copy in a given time, than any other writer. His stories were noted for their ingenuity of plot and rapidity of action. I continued reading his stories in the Chicago Ledger, as late as 1909.

I carried my record over into 1894 for a few months and then dropped it, but have always recorded the books and series. Since about 1898 my interest in "Libraries" declined but never entirely died out, and I have bought some of that class at various times through the years up to the present.

In 1900 I bought two bound volumes of

Happy Days, containing the issues from 1 to 104, but about two years later, traded them in for \$2.00 on a set of Wilkie Collins in 30 volumes. I can buy a set of Collins like that now, for \$1.50, but what would the Happy Days cost? Probably \$100.00 ! Wouldn't that frost you ?

Later, in 1909, I had accumulated about 300 Tip Top Weeklies, a few Army and Navy, and the Half Holiday, No. 1 to 28, which I think was a complete file. I gave all of these to a boy friend when I moved out to K.C. I wish I had them now. But one good thing I did get and keep. That was a copy of Mark Twain's Tramp Abroad, which I bought in 1898 for .50¢ and which proved to be a first edition.

And now I have rambled long enough, so I will stop and give the floor to some one else.

THE LIFE HISTORY OF JOHN HARPER,

of Harper Brothers. Publishers of Harper's Young People-Round the Table, Franklin Square, and other Libraries and Books. (Taken from The Chimney Corner for Feb. 6, 1869-Vol. 8, No. 193, and published by Frank Leslie's of New York).

Very often, on a pleasant afternoon, a plain light wagon, drawn by a pair of sorrel horses, may be seen passing up Harlem Lane toward the upper end of Manhattan Island. Holding the reins, and conversing with his companion-for he rarely drives out alone-is a stoutly-built man, with a notably massive head and chest. He looks about sixty, although he has already celebrated his seventieth birthday. He holds the reins with so firm, and yet so gentle a hand, and the sorrels lay themselves so squarely to their work, that no one but an expert would imagine that this was one of the three fastest teams on the road, unless he happened to notice that team after team kept dropping behind. The stout gentleman who

drives, is John Harper, the eldest but one, of the four brothers who constitute the book publishing firm of Harper & Brothers.

John Harper was born in 1797, at Newton, on Long Island. His father, a substantial farmer, was of English descent; his mother was of Dutch ancestry, speaking to her death, the Dutch language, as well as the English. When about seventeen years old, John Harper came to New York to seek, or rather to make his fortune. His brother James, eighteen months his senior, had already gone there, and was an apprentice to a printer. Two younger brothers remained for a while at the old homestead. John entered a printing office, not as a regularly indentured apprentice, but under engagements to remain until he was twenty years old. Both brothers soon became accomplished workmen. James, a tall young man with uncommon physical strength, was held to be the quickest pressman in town, while John was known as an excellent compositor and accurate proof-reader. James was no sooner "out of his time" than he prepared to set up in business for himself. John's engagement expired at about the same time; and the two brothers, in 1816, entered into partnership as printers, under the names of J. & J. Harper. They were perfect masters of their art; and it soon came to be understood that if anybody wanted a job done quickly and well, the young Harpers were the men to do it. Their business grew, and in 1825, after some changes in location, they established themselves in Cliff Street, upon the ground now covered by a part of their establishment. Before this, they had begun to get up books upon their own account. Their method was one still practiced in England. They would print a book, and then go around among the leading booksellers and sell to each, as many copies as he would take.

Then, two younger brothers, Wesley and Fletcher, had been joined to them, and not long after serving their time, were admitted as partners, the firm name shortly after, being changed to that of Harper & Brothers, which has remained unchanged ever since. The question is often asked, "Which is the Harper and who are the Brothers?" The answer is, "Either of us is 'Harper' and all the rest are the 'Brothers'." In a few years Harper & Brothers had become recognized as the leading book publishers in the country. In 1853, their establishment occupied nine contiguous buildings, the main front being on Franklin Square, but running through to Cliff Street. The three buildings on the square were new, built expressly for their use. They had not fairly occupied them, when, on the 10th of December, 1853, the whole establishment was burned to the ground. In two hours, three-quarters of a million dollars of property, insured for barely a quarter of that sum, was swept from existence.

That evening, the brothers held a consultation. They were no longer young men. Notwithstanding their loss, they still had an ample competence. Moreover, there was not one of them to whom the presidency of a bank or insurance company, with a liberal salary and light labor, was not open. The occasion was a tempting one to retire from heavy work. The four thought briefly and in silence. John spoke first, "Our business", he said, "is too valuable to pass into other hands. We have, all of us, sons. They have helped us, and will soon be able to take our places. We will carry on the business, and show the boys that we are not 'old fogies' yet."

This was agreed to; and, before forty-eight hours had passed, Harper & Brothers had entered into contracts with the principal printers in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia

to do their work for them. They worked double time. They also bought every decent printing press on sale, and contracted by telegraph, for others to be completed by the time when should have a place in which to put them. The great thing to be done, was to plan the buildings for the new establishment, which was to supercede the old one. John Harper undertook this. He had a certain space—a rather irregular piece of ground, one hundred and seventy feet deep, with two frontages of one hundred and twenty feet; in all, about half an acre, or equal to ten city "lots". Upon this ground he was to erect a building, or series of buildings, suitable for a great printing establishment, involving manifold operations, and much machinery. Warnings should be, first of all, fireproof. Fortunately, at just about this time, Peter Cooper had completed his arrangements for rolling iron beams and girders, and was busily engaged in making them for the Cooper Institute. John Harper engaged him to furnish these for the Harper establishment; and the Cooper Institute stood still for a while, rather to the surprise of the public.

Contrary to all precedent, John Harper built within, outward. The height of the buildings, the number of stories, and all the uses to which each should be devoted, were decided, before the form of the exterior was fixed upon.

Of the interior structure of these buildings, we have space only to say, that there is no structure in the country which equals it, in safety, strength, and adaptation for the purposes designed. It is almost absolutely fireproof, no combustible material entering really into its construction. The whole weight rests, not upon the exterior walls, but upon iron columns, running continuously from story to story. It is believed that if the exterior walls were torn away, the structure, loaded as it is, with massive machinery and heavy stock,

would remain intact. Nothing short of an earthquake or a bombardment, it is thought, can disturb these buildings for the generation during which iron and brick and stone will hold together. There is not, moreover, a square foot of space in any story which cannot be used. Every foot is amply lightly and ventilated. The whole credit of this structure belongs to John Harper, and we venture to say that, had the planning and building of our new Court House been committed to him, we should have had a building quite as beautiful and far more useful than the one now nearing completion, and at a quarter of the sum which this will cost.

The Harper Brothers early found it advisable that each should take the special charge of some department of the business. To John, fell that of Financial Manager, including the purchase of stock, materials, and machinery. Before he had reached mid-life, he had shown that he possessed the highest qualities of a man of business. Decision of character is the first thing that strikes one. He makes up his mind quickly and is slow to change his decision. He is always master of himself and his business. No man ever saw him in a hurry; no man ever saw him discourteous. Perfectly honorable himself, he is slow to suspect others of dishonesty. He clings to men whom he has known; and men who know him, cling to him. There is not, probably in the country, another business establishment in which there are so many persons who have remained so long a time. The cashier came with them thirtysix years ago, at the age of fourteen, as a printer apprentice. The foreman of the composing room was their apprentice nearly forty years ago. There is hardly a man occupying a responsible position, who has not grown up with them. There are at least five persons who have been

who have been with them for more than thirty years; and five times as many, for at least twenty years.

In all matters of business the four brothers act as one man. What one says, is binding on all; what one does is done by all. In their relations to their employees, strict honor and absolute integrity on both sides, is the rule. Never, even in the hardest times, has the semi-monthly payday come around, when every workman was not paid in full, and in current funds. Their rule is to pay the highest regular prices for work; and to yield to no dictation as to the manner of conducting business. Hence they have never been seriously embarrassed by strikes. Once, a delegation of the trade, came to them, demanding under penalty of a strike, that they should yield to certain regulations as to the persons to be employed. The response by John Harper, was quick and decisive. "If we cannot conduct our business in our own way, we will close our establishment tomorrow." This was the end of the matter.

Each of the four brothers has some special faculty. James, the oldest, and Fletcher, the youngest, may be set down as the motive power. Wesley looks rather to what is to be done. John is the balance wheel, which keeps everything running in regular order. Nothing can be more quiet than his usual way of life. In the morning, at from seven to nine o'clock, according to the season, he appears at his desk. He rarely leaves this to visit any other part of the establishment. It is said that he has never been seen in the editorial rooms, and not once in six months in any other than the counting room. His brothers, with his own sons and theirs, attend to general business; only, mindful of his early repute as a tasteful compositor, he insists that a specimen page of every important book shall be submitted to him, and above all, that no title page shall

pass without his father. His regular business of the day is usually dispatched before three o'clock. He then leaves for home where business is never allowed to enter. With his own sons, residing under the same roof, he will never talk at home, on business. "Ho! boys", he says, "work is over for the day" and no more genial home exists, than John Harper's. Besides himself and wife—two sons with their wives and children, are its inmates; and it is seldom that one will not find there, other children and grandchildren. After dinner, he usually drives out, sometimes in a family carriage with wife, daughters or grandchildren; sometimes, as we have seen, with his fast team.

John Harper, like all his brothers, and their father and grandfather before them, is a member of the Methodist Church. Never, whether in personal relations or in business matters, has a word been spoken derogatory to that Christian profession which he made, as a boy. He is a self-made man, as indeed, all men are, in the ultimate analysis. But he is not only "self-made", but well made.

Notes..

L.C. Skinner, 36 Chaplin St., Pawtucket, R.I., was up Jan. 30, 1937, to see Pres. Ralph F. Cummings, himself. We did some trading too, and swapped tales with each other. Wish we could all meet up with each other.

A number of interesting ads appeared in the original issue, including three by the publisher, under his own name and that of the Valley Novel Exchange in Fisherville, Mass. Also Geo. Lilly—Frank M. Harris—J. P. Guinon—Wm. M. Kreling—R. T. Wells—Wm. B. McCafferty—Donald S. Learned—Capt. C. G. Mayo—Wm. J. Benners—and Ralph P. Smith.

This Reprint made -7/16/65

PARTIAL LIST OF H.H.B.MEMBERS FOR 1937.

Nos.

- 2 Robert H.Szeltzer,3432 N.Bodine St.,
Philadelphia,Pa.
- 3 Ralph P.Smith,Bcx 985,Lawrence,Mass.
- 7 Wm.M.Burns,15 Cottage St.,Rockland,Me.
- 8 Lacey D.Irwin, Box 117, Kane,Illinois.
- 13 Joseph Potaski,Main & School Sts.,
Farnumsville,Mass.
- 17 G.Fred Orphal,162 Remson Street,
Brooklyn, New York.
- 25 George S.Barton,126 Massachusetts Ave.,
Boston,Mass.
- 27 Edward J.Smeltzer,3432 N.Bodine St.,
Philadelphia,Pa.
- 30 Arvid Dahlstedt,Rto 2-Box 30,
Saratoga Springs,N.Y.
- 45 Raymond L.Caldwell,835 Highland Ave.,
Lancaster,Pa.
- 52 A.W.Edgerton,116 W.6th Avenue,
Houston,Texas.
- 53 H.L.Wilson,Route 1,Alliance,Ohio.
(now member)
- 54 Wm.B.McCafferty,1212 Denver Avenue,
Fort Worth,Texas.
- 56 W.C.Krumbien,5748 Drexel Avelue,
Chicago,Illinois.
- 59 Frank H.Harris,P.O.Box 85,Ashland,N.H.
(now member)
- 10 L.C.Skinner, 36 Chaplin Street,
Pawtucket,R.I.